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In Recognition of Contributions to Fire Protection Engineering

Dennis Birkey

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WPI
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

In Recognition of Contributions to Fire Protection Engineering

Duane Pearsall

Duane Pearsall is best known for his role in the invention of battery- powered smoke detectors. In 1976 the Small Business Administration named him Colorado's Small Business Person of the Year and National Small Business Person of the Year. President Gerald Ford presented the national award in Washington, D.C.

He was a spokesman for the small businesses he considered to be the backbone of the nation's economy. He testified before Congressional committees on small business issues and was a frequent lecturer to business and civic groups, colleges, and universities. He helped found the Small Business Council of the United States Chamber of Commerce in 1976, and in 1979 was chairman of the Colorado Small Business Council. He served as a director of the Denver Chamber of Commerce from 1975 to 1978, as a director of the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry from 1982 to 1989, and as the association chairman in 1985 and 1986.

In 1989 he co-founded Columbine Venture Funds, specializing in new technology. The Rockies Venture Club, an organization that helps entrepreneurs obtain funding, established the Duane Pearsall Entrepreneurial Award, an award given to noteworthy business owners that have included John Elway, former Governor Roy Romer, Bill Daniels (posthumously), Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, and Rick Patch.

A dedicated volunteer to the promotion of fire protection, he was named Fire Protection Man of the Year by the Society of Fire Protection Engineers in 1980. He played a major role in the creation of the Fire Protection Engineering Department at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, now recognized as one of the leading fire safety study programs in the world. In 1996 WPI awarded him an honorary degree in science.

A former colleague, Rexford Wilson, said in a recent interview, "As (Duane) said when President Ford made him the Small Businessman of the Year in 1976, 'I'm the smallest small business man the president could find.' In truth (Duane) was a giant of a man."

Duane Pearsall personified the WPI ideals of problem solving, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The university is honored to call him a member of its family.

(Signed) *Dennis Birkey*
President, WPI

(Signed) *Kathy Ann Notorianni*
Department Head, WPI

(Framed statement presented to members of Duane's family at the Celebration of WPI Department of Fire Safety Engineering September 23, 2010.)